Optional definiteness in Central Kurdish and Balochi. Conceptual and empirical issues

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"Definiteness is the most researched semantic-pragmatic category of nouns [...]" (von Heusinger 2011)

- Identifiability
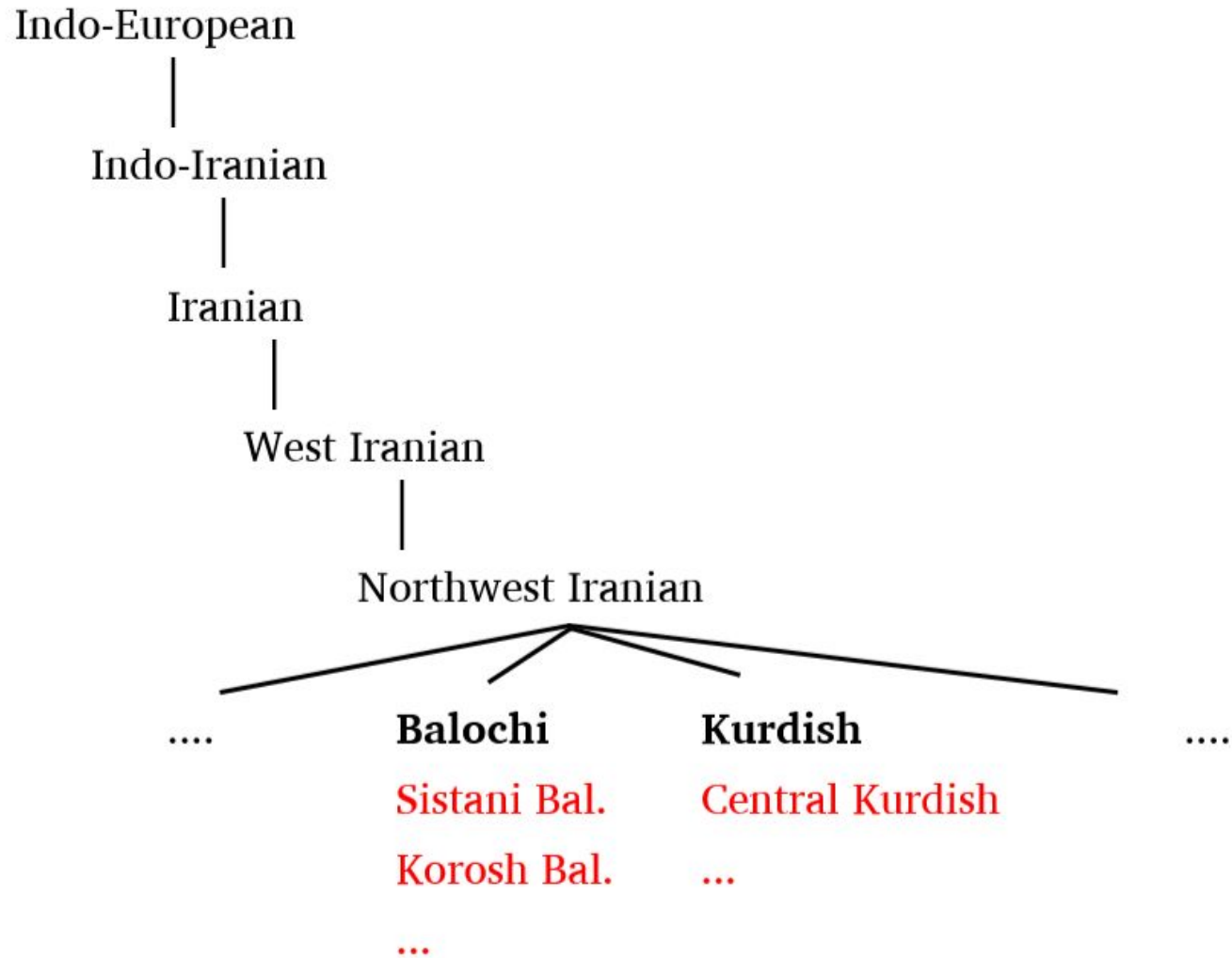- Inclusiveness (following Hawkins 1978, Lyons 1999)

Origins of definiteness markers

"Even though the grammatical category of articles as such is far from being universal, the grammaticalization process that leads to its development exhibits cross-linguistic regularities: in the majority of cases, the definite article originates from a weakened demonstrative, mostly the distal demonstrative [...]."
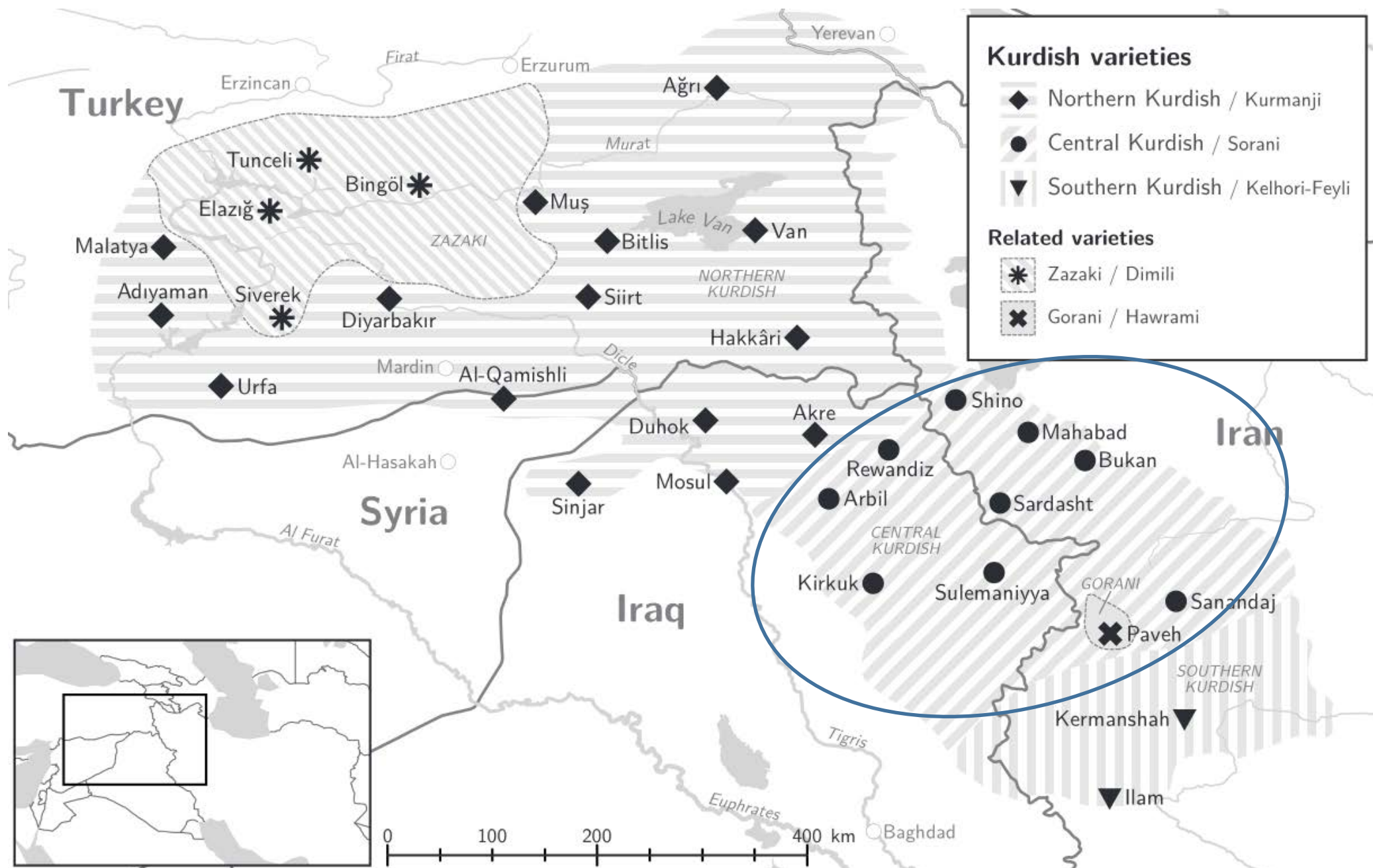De Mulder & Carlier (2011)

(but see now Pakendorf & Krivoshapkina 2014 for a case study of evaluative > definiteness, brought to my attention by Dejan Matić, p.c.)

Central Kurdish and Balochi: Background

Indo-European
|
Indo-Iranian
|
Iranian
|
West Iranian
|
Northwest Iranian

....   **Balochi**   **Kurdish**   ....

Sistani Bal.   Central Kurdish

Korosh Bal.   ...

...

Central Kurdish, also known as Sorani

- Main regional language of the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan in northern Iraq

- Also spoken in adjacent regions of West Iran

- Approx. 6 million speakers

- Majority bilingual

  ➢ see map

Kurdish varieties

- ◆ Northern Kurdish / Kurmanji
- ● Central Kurdish / Sorani
- ▼ Southern Kurdish / Kelhori-Feyli

Related varieties

- ✳ Zazaki / Dimili
- ✖ Gorani / Hawrami

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Balochi

- Geographically dispersed in eastern Iran, southwestern Pakistan, parts of Turkmenistan

- Lack of official status in the settlement states (Iran, Pakistan, Turkmenistan)

- Approx. 5-8 million speakers (Jahani & Korn 2009: 634)

- Majority bilingual

- Focus here on two dialects: Sistani, and Koroshi

  ➢ see map

(Koroshi Balochi)

Sistani Balochi

Definiteness marker in Central Kurdish

All sources claim that in Central Kurdish, definiteness is regularly marked in the noun phrase (e.g. MacKenzie 1961, McCarus 2009, Zahedi & Mehrazmay 2011, Öpengin 2016, Tahir 2017, Haig, in press)

The definiteness marker is a **suffix** of the form:

-ek(e)

(in some sources written *-ak(a)*)

Paradigm of definiteness marking in Central Kurdish

	NON-REFERENTIAL, GENERIC	INDEFINITE	DEFINITE
SING.	pyāw	pyāw-ēk	pyāw-eke
PLURAL	pyāw	pyāw-ān	pyāw-ek-ān

Table 1: Nominal inflection, 'man' (McCarus 2009: 613)

Definiteness marking in Koroshi Balochi

Examples from Koroshi Balochi (Nourzaei et al 2015, traditional narratives)

(1) *ham=ī* ***kačal*-ok-*ā*** *bokan=om*

 emph.this **girl**-OK-OBL want=1SG

 'I want just **this girl**'

(2) *pūl-ā*   *a=dā*   ***ālem*-ok-*ā***

 money-OBL ASP=give.PRS.3SG **wise.man**-OK-OBL

 '(She) gives money to **the wise man**'

But:

(3) *ke* ***joġla***   *'ra*   *madra'sa [...]*

 when **boy**   go.PST.3SG school

 'when **the boy** went to school ...'

('the boy' in (3) is a previously introduced referent who plays a prominent role throughout the narrative)

Summary

Definiteness is associated with a **K-suffix** in both languages

-*eke* in Central Kurdish

-*ok* / -*ak* in Baloch

- Occurs **inside** other inflectional categories (case and number)
- In all three varieties there is a **three-way opposition** for singular count nouns:

  - bare
  - with **indefiniteness** suffix -*ē(k)*
  - with K-suffix

- Functions of K-suffixes within this constellation vary
- In some dialects of Balochi, the K-suffix -*ok/-ak* is still considered a diminutive

Comparative analysis of definiteness marking in Balochi and Kurdish

Five ontological categories

CATEGORY	EXAMPLE
HUMAN, SINGULAR	*woman*
HUMAN, PLURAL	*women*
NON-HUMAN, COUNT, SINGULAR	*book*
NON-HUMAN, COUNT, PLURAL	*books*
MASS	*electricity*

Eight categories of information status

CATEGORY	EXAMPLE
NEW / FIRST MENTION	*Finally we reached **a hut**$_1$*
BRIDGING / ASSOCIATIVE	***the door** was open.*
ANAPHORIC	***The hut**$_1$ was cold and dark.*
+ DEMONSTRATIVE	***This** lecture is boring.*
+ POSSESSED	*We heard the **woman's voice**.*
PROPER NAME	*We met **Maryam**.*
UNIQUE	***The moon** rose.*

Six miniatures
- Approx. 430 words in total (English version)
- Translated into Persian
- Speakers requested to translate the stories into the target language (their L1) in informal colloquial language, as though speaking to a relative or close friend, and the resulting text is recorded.
- Total length of recordings between 2-3 minutes.
- Pilot phase with four speakers, the miniatures then modified to current version
- 104 target items in total

First miniature, pilot version (modified and extended in the final version)

When we went to the garden we saw a man and his son. The man was up a tree, picking apples. He threw the apples to his son. The boy put them in a basket. I said to the boy: "Please give me that basket!" He gave me the basket but I dropped it on the ground.

Human, singular, first mention

Human, singular, possessed

When we went to the garden we saw a man and his son. The man was up a tree, picking apples. He threw the apples to his son. The boy put them in a basket. I said to the boy: "Please give me that basket!" He gave me the basket but I dropped it on the ground.

Non-human, singular, anaphoric

Non-human, plural, anaphoric

Human, singular, first mention

Human, singular, possessed

ما وقتی رفتیم سر باغ یک مردی را با پسرش دیدیم. مرد بالای یک درخت بود و داشت سیب می‌چید. سیب‌ها را می‌انداخت پایین برای پسرش. پسر آنها را می‌گذاشت توی یک سبد. من به پسر گفتم: "آن سبد را بده به من." او سبد را به من داد ولی من آن را انداختم زمین.

Non-human, singular, anaphoric

Non-human, plural, anaphoric

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engl	obj.lang.token	def-suff	i-suff	pl	poss	dem
a man	pyaw-ēk	0	1	0	0	0
his son	kur-eke=y	1	0	0	0	1
the man	pyaw-eke	1	0	0	0	0
a tree	draxt-ēk	0	1	0	0	0
apples	sēw=ī	0	0	0	0	0
the apples	sēw-ek-ān=ī	1	0	1	0	0
his son	kur-eke-y	1	0	0	0	1
the boy	kur-eke=šī	1	0	0	0	1
a basket	sewetēyek	0	1	0	0	0
the boy	kur-eke=yim	1	0	0	0	0
that basket	ew sewetē	0	0	0	0	0
the basket	sewet-eke	1	0	0	0	0
the ground	xwer					
my brother	bray-eke=m	1	0	0	0	1
a teacher	mi'alim	0	0	0	0	0
a school	medrese-yē	0	1	0	0	0
Tehran	tehran	0	0	0	0	0
the director	modir-i medres-eke	0	0	0	0	1

Tabelle1 Tabelle3 Tabelle2
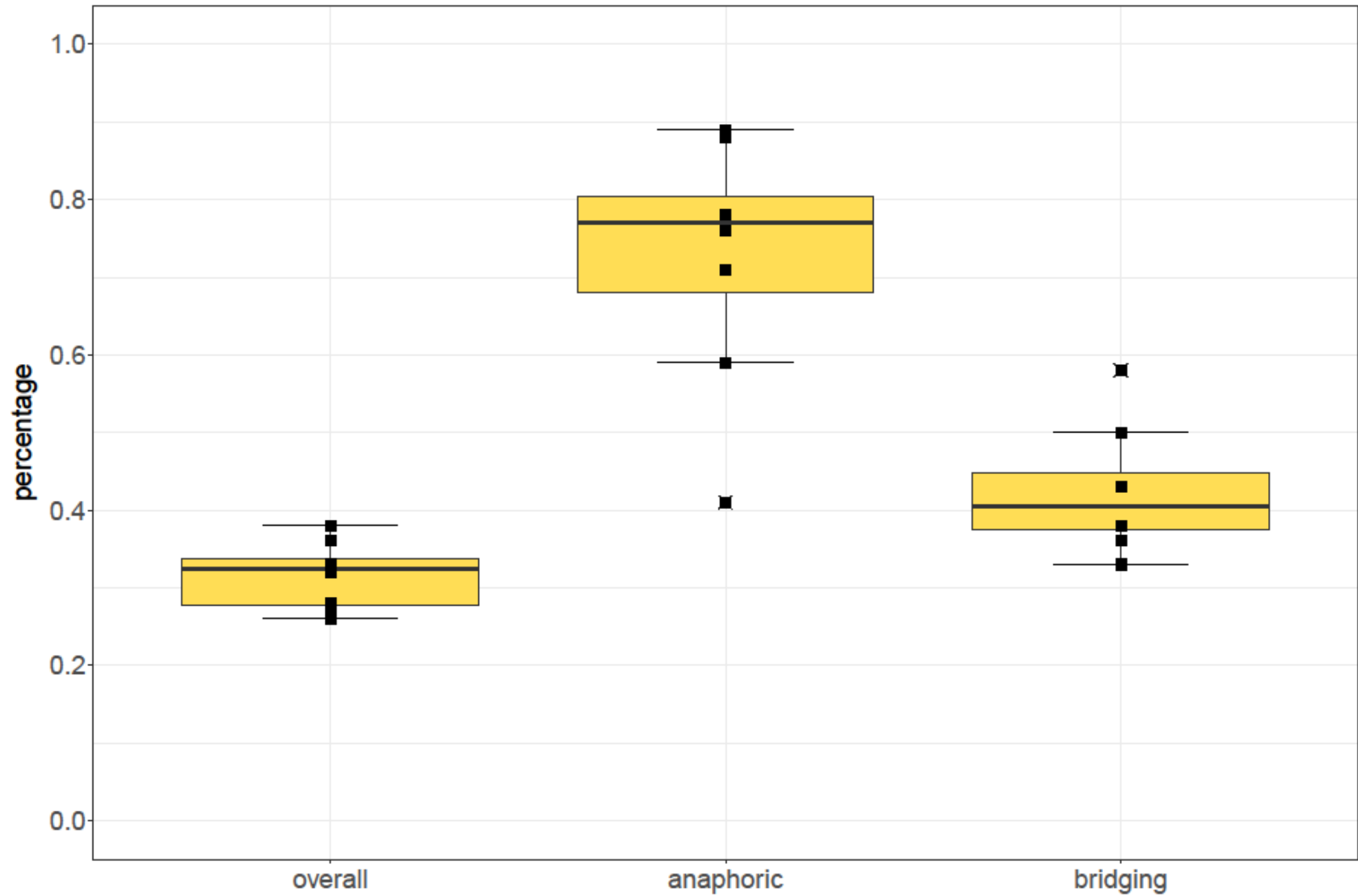
Sound sample from:

Central Kurdish, dialect of Baneh, Iran
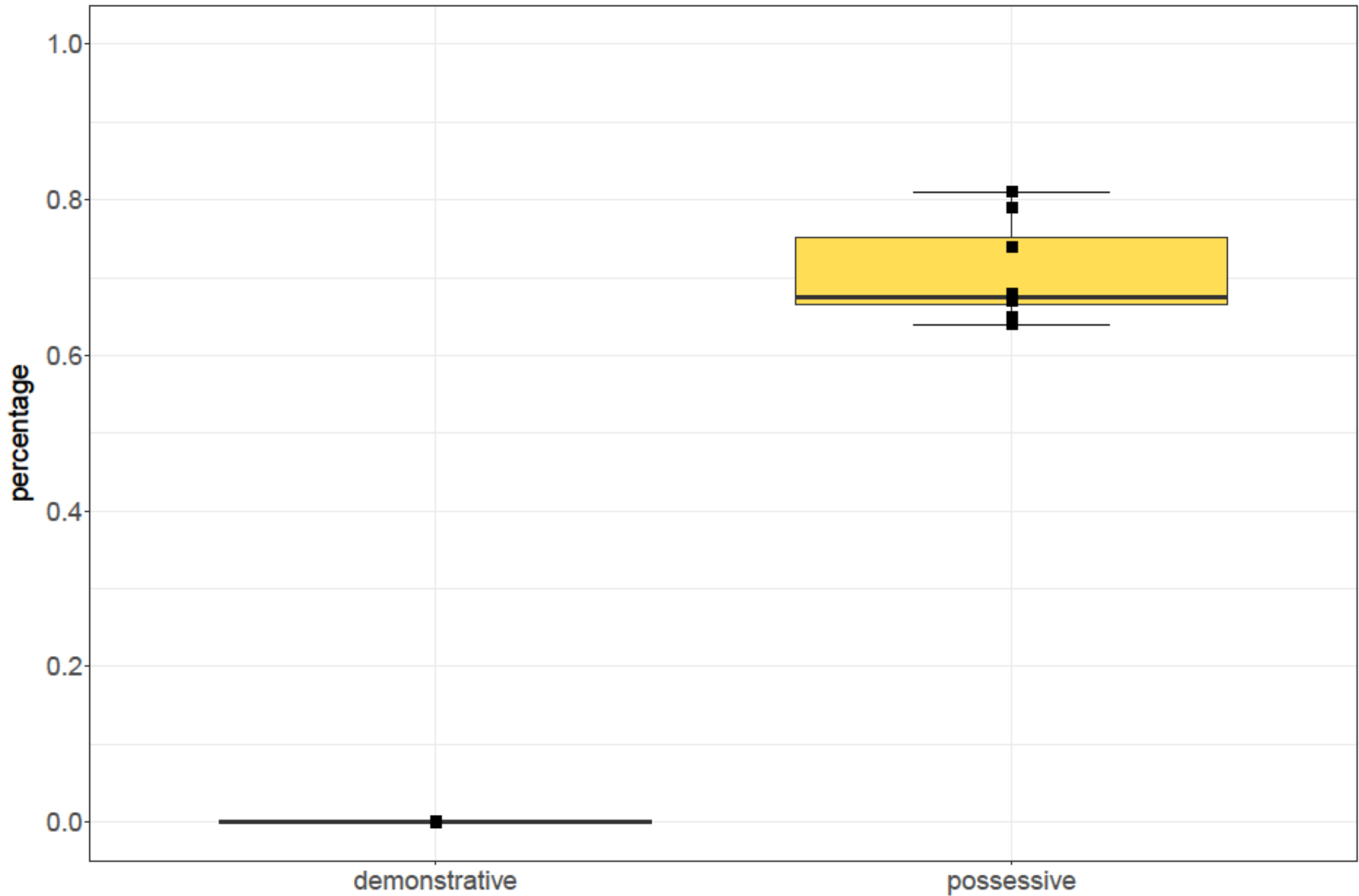
Female speaker, 35 years old

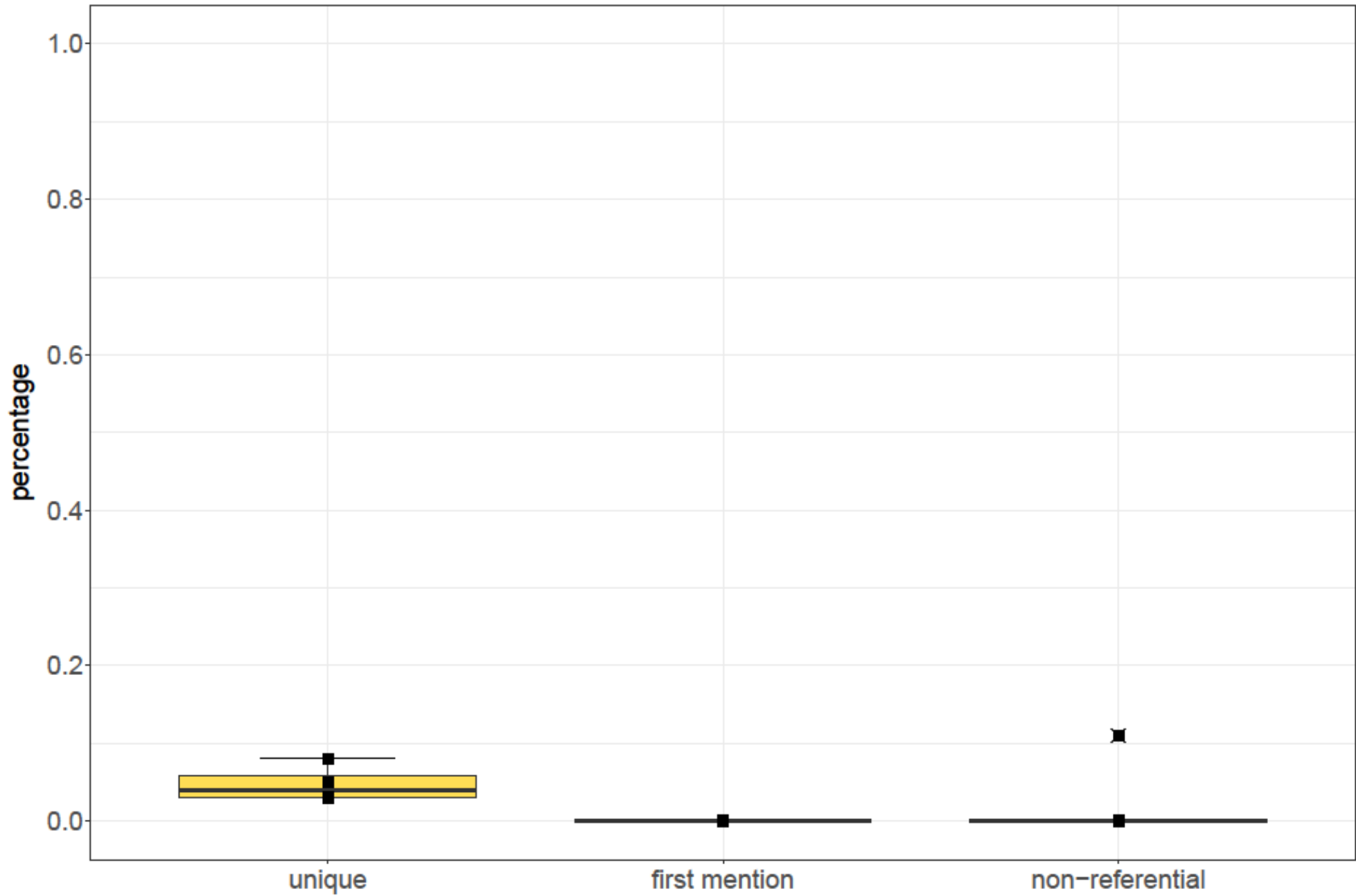Recorded by Masoud Mohammadirad

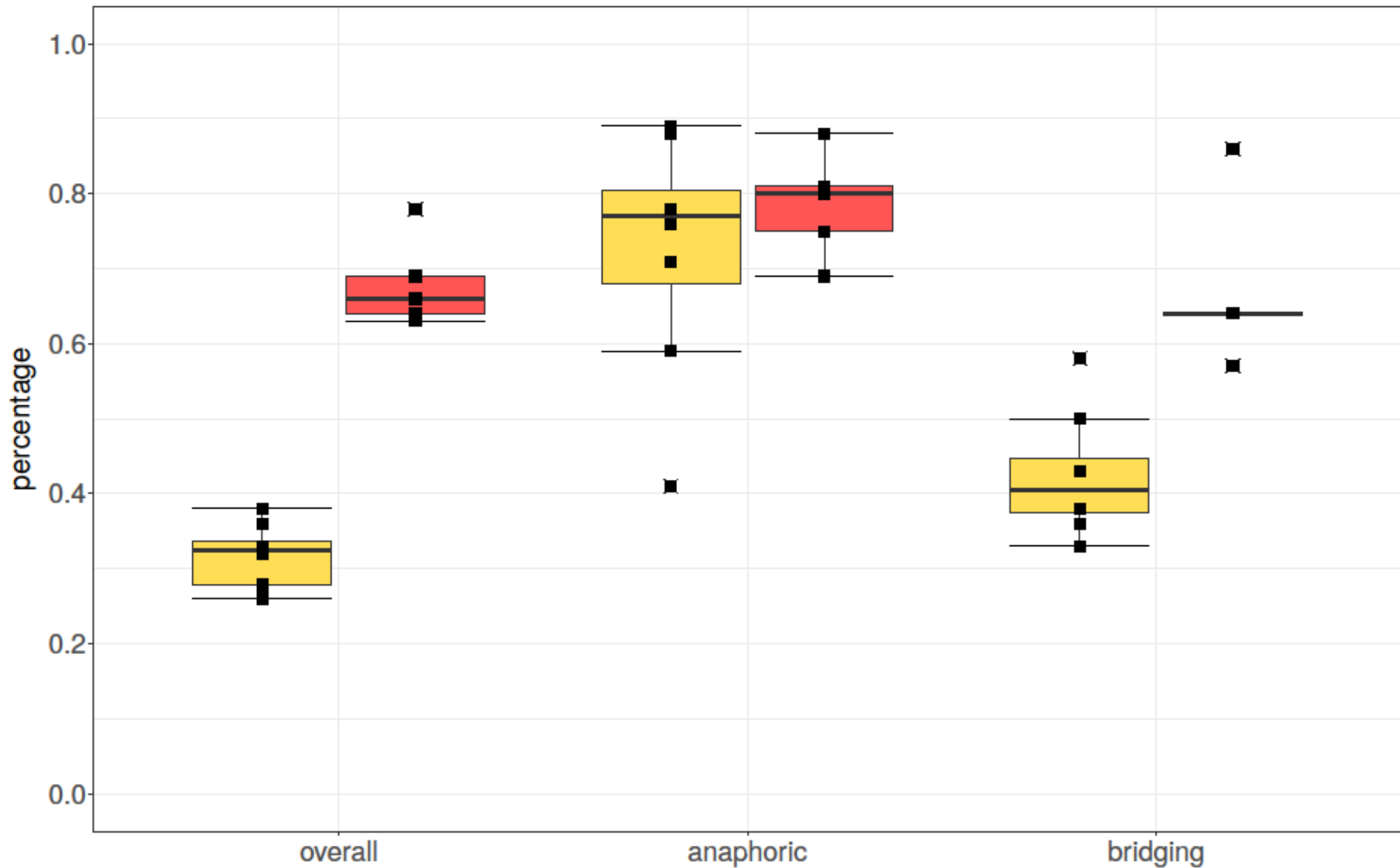Story 1 (pilot questionnaire)

Central Kurdish: % K−suffixes

Central Kurdish: % K-suffixes
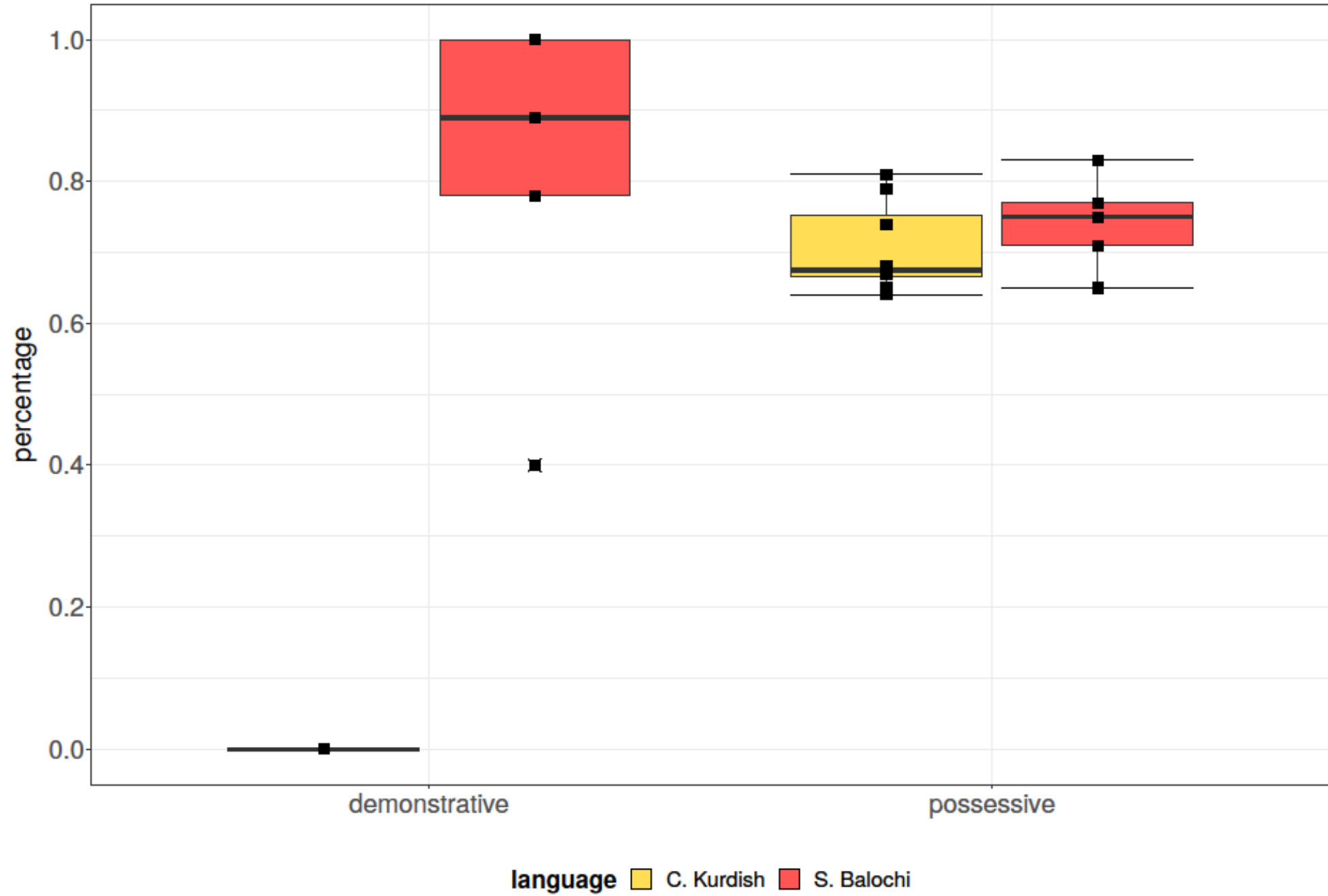
Central Kurdish: % K−suffixes
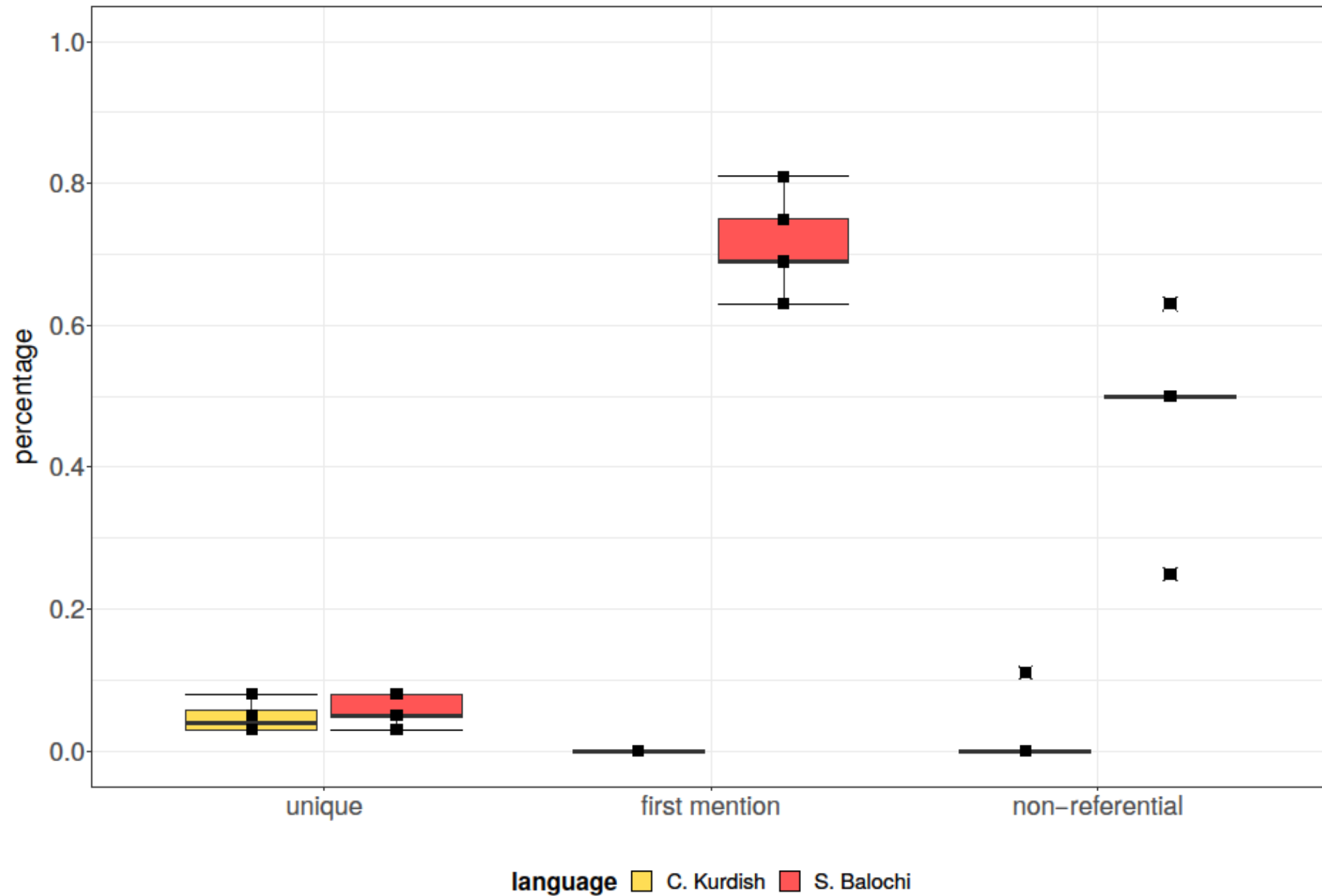
Central Kurdish vs. Sistani Balochi: % K-suffixes

Central Kurdish vs. Sistani Balochi: % K-suffixes

Central Kurdish vs. Sistani Balochi: % K–suffixes

Summary % K-suffixes (rounded mean values)

	CENT. KURD	SISTANI BALOCHI	KOROSHI BALOCHI
OVERALL	35	65	25
ANAPH	75	75	80
BRIDGING	40	65	50
+ DEM	0	90	100
+ POSS	70	70	0
UNIQUE	0	0	(25)
1ST MENTION	0	70 (!)	0
NON-REF	0	50 (!)	0

- **Language-specific constraints, for example:**

  *demonstrative + K-suffix (Central Kurdish)

  *possessive + K-suffix (Koroshi Balochi)

  *plural + K-suffix (Koroshi Balochi)

- K-suffixes in Central Kurdish and Koroshi Balochi would qualify as 'articles' according to Becker 2018, but not in Sistani Balochi.
- K-suffixes are rampant in Sistani, but are not systematically associated with definite contexts

Origins of the K-suffixes:

The most **plausible** source: a so-called 'diminutive' suffix, that was among the most productive nominal suffixes of Western Middle Iranian, with the form *-ak/-ag*.

How likely is diminutive > definiteness marker?

- Diminutive should not be confused with marking 'small size'.
- Indication of size is almost always conflated with additional semantic dimensions, which share the feature of expressing a subjective **stance, or emotive evaluation** on the part of the speaker (Ponsonnet 2018).
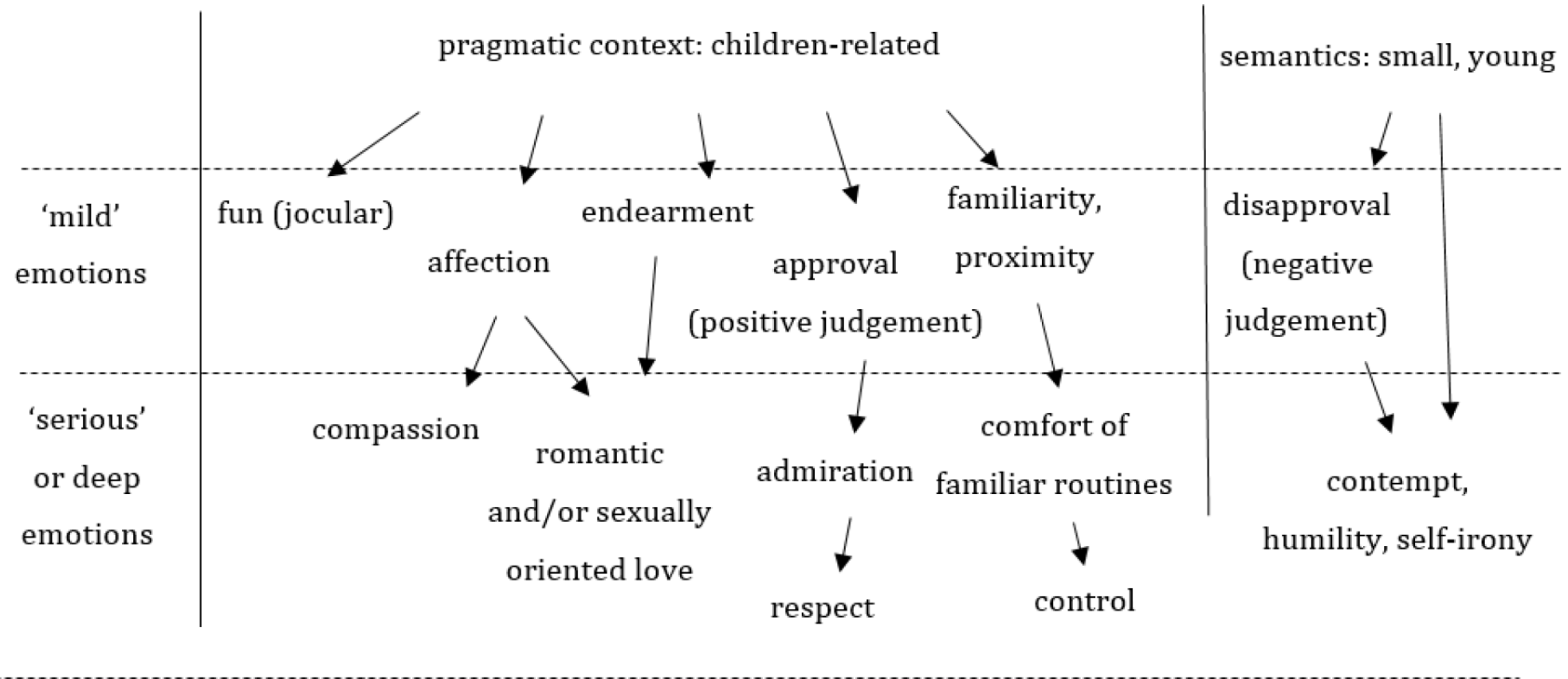
Figure 1. Emotional connotations of diminutives.

(Ponsonnet 2018)

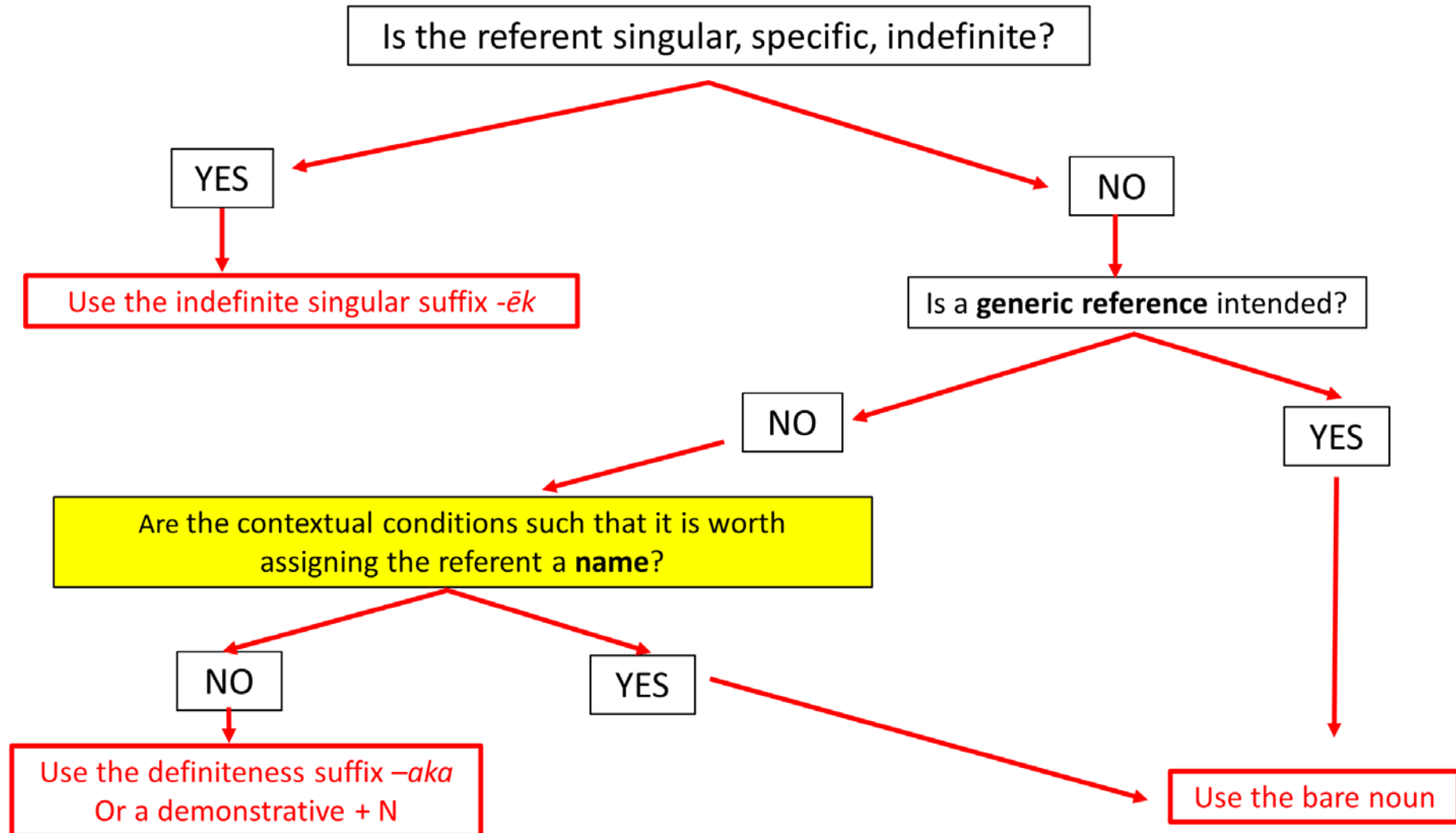| MORPHOLOGY:	derivation > inflection		
CONTENT:	empathy/endearment > familiarity > identifiability		
DOMAIN:	Speaker-centred emotional coloring	>	information management

Eight lexical mentions of a central participant in a spoken traditional narrative

(Central Kurdish, Öpengin 2016: 183-187)

#1	***nejār-ēk*** = *iš* = *i*		*lē*	*bū*	INDEF. SUFFIX
	carpenter-**INDEF** = ADD = its	in.it	was		
	'There was **a carpenter** there too.'				
#2	***nejār-eke*** = *ši*		*kutī*		K-SUFFIX
	carpenter-DEF = ADD	say.PST.3SG			
	'**The carpenter** too said …'				
#3	… *nejār* …	'the carpenter'			BARE
#4	… *nejār* …	'the carpenter'			BARE
#5	… *nejār* …	'the carpenter'			BARE
#6	… *nejār* …	'the carpenter'			BARE
#7	… *nejār* …	'the carpenter'			BARE
#8	… *nejār* …	'the carpenter'			BARE

Provisional decision tree for (in-)definiteness marking in Central Kurdish, singular count nouns only

Is the referent singular, specific, indefinite?

YES → Use the indefinite singular suffix *-ēk*

NO → Is a **generic reference** intended?

NO → Are the contextual conditions such that it is worth assigning the referent a **name**?

YES → Use the bare noun

NO → Use the definiteness suffix *–aka* Or a demonstrative + N

YES → Use the bare noun

Conclusions

- Definiteness systems with non-demonstrative origins **can** develop into systems displaying – superficially at least – a comparable profile to demonstrative-origin systems.

- Mini-narrative format captures a rough definiteness profile that can be used for cross-language comparison, and identifying areas of stability and variability

Conclusions (cont.)

- Fails to capture **optional definiteness** characteristic of these systems, which emerges only when longer stretches of connected discourse are considered

- It appears that referents of varying kinds can be assigned name status on the fly and in a local discourse setting, if the speaker can assume **sufficient familiarity with the identity of the participants**, and thus occur in bare noun form. This usage is probably more frequent in traditional narratives.

- Somewhat paradoxically, the most persistent and topical referents thus dispense with overt definiteness marking

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